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The Power of Perceived Authenticity: Comparing the Efficacy of Endorsements of
Beauty Products between Traditional Celebrities and Social Media Influencers

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ABSTRACT

Celebrity endorsement has been perceived as one of the most effective marketing tactics to trigger consumers' intent to purchase for decades. A successful celebrity endorsement could positively affect consumers' attitudes towards the brand in addition to the products. Studies show celebrities could also impact the connection with the brand in terms of sales, and even brand switching.

However, with the growing popularity of the social media networks, many companies recognize the potential marketing strategy for hiring social media influencers as endorsers in order to reach younger target audiences.

The goal of this study addresses the participant's efficacy in putting on makeup after watching a "real person" beauty blogger versus a celebrity blogger. The intent of this study is to determine which type of endorsers are more effective on the target audience. This effectiveness will be measured by variables such as credibility, professionalism, attractiveness, and customers' intent to purchase.

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Chapter 1

Literature Review

Marketing is expanding across multimedia platforms now more than ever, and businesses are relying on the most effective marketing techniques to generate sales. One of the most effective strategies for marketing is to find familiar faces or professionals to represent the brand. Businesses are looking for celebrities and social media influencers to spread the word about their product. Coincidentally, debates often arise regarding who, between celebrity and influencer, seem to gain more traction for generating business.

Celebrity

In the 1880s, the word celebrity mainly referred to individuals who were politicians, scientists, doctors, and writers. (BBC ideas) After the 1920s, with the growing development of the film and entertainment industry, the conceptual scope of ‘celebrity’ began to also include famous singers, athletes, and actors. Celebrities, explained by Hamish Pringle and Les Binet, are have greater advertising potential than being simply portrayed in advertising. “It is their outstanding skill in their chosen field of endeavor which has brought them into the public eye and made them an object of veneration and respect.” (Hamish & Binet, 2005, p. 202)

Celebrity endorsement

Celebrity endorsement is a ubiquitous feature of modern marketing that has been used for decades (McCracken, 1989, p. 310). Since 1920, advertisers have used famous people for product endorsements. Actresses Joan Crawford, Clara Bow, and Janet Gaynor were among the first celebrities to promote products (Emmadi, 2017, p. 29). According to *The New YorkTimes*,

corporate brands have increasingly used sports icons, Hollywood celebrities, and singers to sell their products (Creswell, 2008). In 2004, celebrities appeared in around 19% of all advertainments in America, 24% of the ads in India, and 45% in Taiwan. It is estimated that two to three billion dollars were spent on celebrity advertising in 2006 in the US. (Runyan et al., 2009). Additionally, as claimed by *Forbes Magazine*, Pepsi paid out 50 million to Beyoncé for the 2013 Super Bowl branding endorsement and Nike spends over 2 billion a year on famous athlete endorsements (Casserly, 2012). Celebrity endorsements have become a significant tool in advertising.

Different Types of Celebrity Endorsement

There are various ways for marketers to employ celebrity endorsements. Celebrity testimonial is perceived as one of the most powerful methods of advertising; this includes voiceovers, music, photography, television spots, and live appearances (Hamish Pringle and Les Binet,). For example, McDonald's slogan "I'm loving it" was first recorded by singer and pop-icon, Justin Timberlake. Soon after the commercial aired, it rapidly spread throughout the world. Celebrity product placement is another common strategy used to promote products. Through subtle advertising, the consumer associates the featured product with the celebrity. One of the most successful examples would be the use of Ray-Ban glasses in feature films. Studies find, "Ray-Ban has a long-standing involvement in product placement since 1961." (Hamish Pringle and Les Binet, 2005, p. 205). In the movie 'Breakfast at Tiffany's', Audrey Hepburn featured the Ray-Ban glasses. Later, Ray-Ban continued this strategy in the Matrix film series, which led to a 20% increase in their sales (Hamish Pringle and Les Binet, 2005, p. 205).

Additionally, instead of being hired by other brands, celebrities could market and sell their own brand by using their reputation. Kylie Jenner, a reality star in the show "Keeping Up

With The Kardashians,” built up her own cosmetics empire by modeling it herself; she has more than 175 million followers on Instagram that will see her promotions (Willen, 2020). According to Forbes, Jenner had a revenue of \$200 million in 2019 (Berg, 2020). This is a prime example of a contemporary celebrity endorser that markets her products on traditional media channels and social media.

Effectiveness of Celebrity Endorsement

In the past decades, ample research has been done to analyze the impact of different routes for celebrity endorsement. It has been found that celebrities can improve brand awareness, distribute positive images, (Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Atkin & Block, 1983), and attract consumers’ attention. Other studies related to consumer behavior have found that consumers consider information from celebrities as more relatable to their lifestyle and interests, compared to other non-celebrity endorsers (Biswas, Hussain & O’Donnell, 2009, p.121).

Overall, consumers are more likely to accept celebrity endorsement and purchase the products because they find celebrities more relatable. the same time, people consider celebrities to possess a certain standard; the product is then perceived in line with that celebrity’s ideals. They feel compelled to buy the product because they want to achieve the exact look, lifestyle, and/or characteristic of the celebrity depicted in the advertisement. For example, an individual might imagine themselves to be an athlete like David Beckham, who has been a brand ambassador for a lot of companies (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Therefore, consumers will purchase the products from Adidas, Burberry, etc. from which David Beckham has endorsed .

However, celebrity endorsement needs to be done carefully. The celebrities authenticity and opinion regarding the product could largely affect the effectiveness of the endorsement. Consumers are more likely to have a positive evaluation of the brand when a celebrity endorser

is perceived as motivated by product quality rather than by financial gain. (Bergkvist, Hjalmarson, & Magi, 2016, p. 180).

Furthermore, whether the brand fits the endorser is another issue that marketers need to consider. Previous studies demonstrate that a good fit between celebrity endorsers and brand/product could engender positive attitude towards the brand and raise the trustworthiness of the endorsement (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020, p. 259). Many authors also investigated that, “Consumers’ perceptions of endorsers credibility and likability lessen as the number of products a celebrity-endorsed increases “(Tripp, Jensen, & Calson, 1994, p. 535). Celebrities’ misbehavior could potentially damage the brand image, including any fall from the media spotlight after a period of time (Ziegel, 1983). It is necessary for marketers to consider all of the strengths and weaknesses of a celebrity when they are planning to employ them in an endorsement strategy.

Influencer

The growth of social media platforms has resulted in the increased number of people who use social media. In China, one of the major social network sites, Weibo, gained over 445 million users by March 2019. By the end of 2019, 79% of Americans had a social media profile; on the world-wide scale, 3.5 billion people signed up for at least one social media platform (Clement, 2020). In April 2019, the total number of Facebook users had reached 2.32 billion, followed by YouTube, which has 1.9 billion users (Ward, 2020).

Influencer Endorsement

According to *Ad Age*, the influencer marketing industry is growing “faster than ever” and it has become one of the most critical components in Ad campaigns (Patrick Ward, 2020). By employing influencers as a third party endorsers for the brand, marketers are able to deliver

brand messages to their followers in order to reach different segments of target audience through various social media platforms. In May of 2015, EMarketer reported over 80% of companies planned to employ influencers in advertising campaigns in 2016 (EMarketer, 2015). It is also estimated that by the end of 2022, brands will spend around \$15 billion on influencer marketing (Schomer, 2019). Conclusively, influencer endorsements has become a popular trend and will continue to grow in the future.

Effectiveness of Influencers

A number of researchers in advertising/marketing field have recently conducted studies to analyze the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies, concluding that Influencers manifest compelling outcome both on media coverage and consumer persuasion (Goodman, Booth & Matic, 2011). Compared to celebrities, influencers are considered to be more “organic”. The study also found that, “Bloggers are accepted as ‘one of us’ by Internet users” (Goodman, Booth & Matic, 2011). Social media influencers are also called content creators or, storytellers unlike traditional celebrities whose endorsement are fully scripted. These influencers generate content on the topics they are passionate about, such as beauty, fashion, and fitness (Lin, Bruning, and Swarna, 2018). Their creativity is vital to brand storytelling as well as product promoting and, their opinions are perceived as more persuasive than the content brands use independently (Kristen Forbes, 2016, p. 78). Influencers generate virtual communities with their fans. It has been seen that, “Bloggers consider blogging a personal medium for self-expression, community connection and sharing opinions” (Smith,2010, p. 175). A survey conducted by Google shows that 40% of millennials thought that their favorite YouTube Influencer connected with them more than their friends (Blumenstei & O’Neil-Hart, 2016). They regularly engage with their audience by frequently updating their vlog, posts, and replying to comments fromthe

followers (Liu et al, 2012). They have been known to offer advice and recommendations to followers regarding endorsements and provide detailed personal reviews on their products. Followers trust these influencers because of the unique consumer-peer status;. they believe that the comments and recommendations made by influencers for certain brands are indicative of their high quality (Freberg et al, 2011). This results in positively impacted purchase intention. Data has shown that 60% of YouTube followers searched for advice from the influencers before purchasing a product.

Additionally, the influencer marketing strategy provides marketers with flexibility to reach out to niche target audiences. In general, Influencers could be divided into two groups: Macro influencers, who have millions of followers and Micro influencers who have less than 100,000 followers (Dhanik, 2016). According *Ad Age*, Macro influencers are the best option for marketers who want to reach out to a diverse and wide fan base. However, brands that want to “target a particular type of customer” should choose micro-influencers to enable them to accurately target a specific audience (Dhanik, 2016). Although micro-influencers have smaller groups of followers, their engagement rates with the audience is higher. They are considered to be more relatable, and the content posts they make are more authentic and personal (Dhanik,201

Chapter 2

Theory Development

Credibility

Credibility refers to the perception of trust and believability. An increasing number of studies have found that credible endorsers' advertisements are more persuasive than the untrustworthy ones (Nam-Hyun Um, 2017). Influencers create more detailed and creative content compared to a celebrity whose endorsement is well scripted by the brand. Many beauty influencers make videos of their real experiences, using authentic reviews for the product. They show the audience an honest comparison of the before and after changes, in addition to talking about both the advantages and disadvantages of the product. Compared to the celebrities whose advertisements might be fully script, the influencers provide consumers with more comprehensive information of the product. Therefore, they will be perceived as more credible.

H1: Influencers will be seen as more credible than celebrity endorsers in the beauty blogging context.

Attractiveness

“Attractiveness refers to the receiver’s perception of the endorser in terms of his/her appeal in arousing interest” (Joseph, 1982, p.15). Consumers who recognize the celebrity and/or find them attractive are motivated to pay attention to new featured events as well as his/her endorsed brand or product because the celebrity may be perceived as attractive (Schiappa, Allen, & Gregg 2007). Additionally, products associated with physical attractiveness (like beauty products, dresses, shampoos, etc.) are largely influenced by the endorsers’ physical appeal (Jamil & Rameez, 2014, P.23)

This study focuses on advertisement in the beauty industry. The endorsers that brands use for promoting beauty products are often actresses or models who are visually appealing, have radiant skin, and are considered ‘perfect’ by societal standards. On the contrary, beauty bloggers are considered more ‘ordinary’ with an ‘average’ appearance, in regard to societal standards. They are the true experts who are passionate about the beauty industry.

H2: Celebrities will be perceived as more attractive than influencers.

Professionalism

Celebrities who are chosen to endorse certain beauty products are usually experts in their own professional area such as acting or modeling. Majority of these celebrities are not professionals within the beauty arena. Beauty Influencers tend to make the beauty blogging industry their priority and/or career. They are motivated to try different products and devoted their time to providing authentic recommendations for the followers; some even go as far as to explain each ingredient and the scientific theory behind it. Additionally, many conduct experiments of their own to test the effectiveness of the product to support their recommendations.

H3: Influencers are recognized as more professional in the beauty industry than celebrities.

Consumer Attitude Towards the Brand

Credibility, professionalism, trustworthiness, etc., all play important roles that may affect consumers’ attitude towards the brand. Consumers are more likely to believe the words of influencers because influencers usually endorse the brand in the real-life setting and demonstrate the products themselves. However, celebrities’ endorsements are often perceived as more commercially driven and inauthentic.

H4: Consumers will more likely to purchase a beauty product endorsed by influencers.

H5: Consumers will feel more comfortable applying the make-up after watching the influencer's blogging video featuring the product.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Experiment Design

The study compares two groups, influencer and celebrity. There were 4 videos. The videos featured either a celebrity or an influencer and one of 2 brands. This was done to increase message variance (Thorson, Wicks & Leshner, 2012).

The focus of the study is to compare the effectiveness of the endorsement of a beauty product by an influencer and a celebrity. The Institutional Review Board had approved the research before the data collection process.

Participants

A total of 160 females participated in this study. Participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk and randomly assigned to their condition.

One hundred twenty-six (126) of them provided valid data. The age range among the participants was between 18 to 34 years old. The experiment focused on female (US citizens) because majority of beauty product consumers' demographics are female. Twenty-three (23) participants viewed the celebrity endorsement videos and 25 participants viewed the influencer endorsement videos.

Stimulus Materials

Four beauty endorsement videos have been downloaded from YouTube. There are two products in the study, and both products matched with two endorsers: one is celebrity endorsers, the other is influencer endorsers.

Two Estee Lauder Double Wear Foundation ads are featured; one is endorsed by celebrity Karlie Kloss, a well-known fashion supermodel. Another is endorsed by Casey Holmes, a popular YouTube influencer.

Two Fenty Beauty Match Stix Matte Contour Skinstick ads are featured as well. One video is introduced by Rihanna, the famous singer and songwriter. Another one is endorsed by Marie Jay, a beauty influencer in YouTube.

Independent variables

There are two independent variables in the study; one is celebrity endorser, another one is influencer endorser. In this study, the researcher put the fashion supermodel Karlie Kloss and famous singer Rihanna into one group, labeled as celebrity endorser group. Two Youtuber beauty influencers (Casey Holmes & Marie Jay) are placed into another group called influencer endorser.

Dependent variables

All of the dependent variables are measured based on self-report responses. The 7-point Likert scales that have been used in each dependent variable are the same.

(1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5=somewhat disagree, 6=disagree, 7=strongly disagree)

Credibility

Credibility was measured using a 7-point Likert scale, (1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3=somewhat agree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5=somewhat disagree, 6=disagree, 7=strongly disagree). Three items are included in the credibility scale. The participant were asked to respond to the following statement; The endorser you saw in the video could be mostly perceived as

(1)credible, (2)believable, (3)reputable,(4) trustable. The structure of the scale was adapted from Ohanian (1990). $\alpha =0.843$.

Professionalism

The participants were asked to rate the endorser's professionalism by using the items created by Fogg, B., Tseng, H. (1999) The items are (1) knowledgeable, (2) competent (3) intelligent, (4) capable (5)experienced (6)powerful. $\alpha =0.912$.

Attractiveness

Eight items are included in the scale, which are (1)Classy, (2)Beautiful, (3)Elegant,(4) Sexy, (5)Cool,(6)Authentic,(7)Real, (8)Genuine. $\alpha =0.911$.

Intension to purchase & confidence to put the makeup on

Both of the questions are designed to analyze the consumer attitude towards the endorsements. Participants are asked to respond to the following questions, respectively, with the previous 7-point Likert scale: (1) I intend to purchase the product; (2) I would feel confident using this product to reproduce the look in the video

Procedure

Questionnaires are designed using Qualtrics. There are four surveys; all of them contained the same content with the exception of the stimulus. The number and order of the questions were the same. The researcher generated four links for all four surveys and sent those links to Amazon Mturk. Amazon Mturk randomly assigned a link to the participant. Participants were able to open the link at any time using any device. After they clicked the link, they were redirected to the instruction page. The instruction page introduced the aim of the survey, in addition to the contact information of the researcher. The IRB implied consent form was also

presented in the instruction prompt. Participants were then asked the first question, which inquired whether or not they were willing to give this survey their full attention. If they agreed, they were allowed to continue to participate in the study. After that, one of the four stimuli would appear. Users were not able to skip the one-minute (approximately) video when being played. After the participants saw the video, they were asked a couple of questions about their perceptions toward the endorsements. Near the end of the survey, participants were asked some demographic questions designed to confirm their identity. The entire process took approximately 5-10 minutes. Data was considered invalid and deleted in the data cleaning report if a participant took three minutes or less for the survey.

Data Analysis

Data analysis are conducted through the SPSS STATISTICS software. One-way ANOVA is the primary analysis method to test the hypotheses in this study.

Chapter 4

Results

All hypotheses were tested using a respective one-way ANOVA test conducted on each dependent variable. All dependent variables (DV) are measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree).

H1: Influencers will be seen as more credible than celebrity endorsers in the beauty blogging context

From the ANOVA statistics, $F(1,125) = 9.84, p < .01$ indicated a significant main effect for influencer type. Based on the descriptive statistics, the mean for perceived credibility for celebrity endorsed products is 2.15, and 2.77 for influencers. In other words, the participant has a more positive attitude toward the subject when the point value is lower in the mean result. Because one equates to “agree strongly” and seven equates to “disagree strongly”, the endorser with the lower rate is more credible.

H2: Celebrities will be perceived as more attractive than influencers.

The main effect of endorsers type on attractiveness was tested significantly, such that celebrities featured in the Stimulus are perceived as more attractive than influencers, $F(1,125) = 22.308, p < .01$. The mean of the celebrity endorsers' at a 2.14 point value of attractiveness is lower than the real influencers' value with a mean of 2.94.

H3: Influencers are recognized as more professional in the beauty industry than celebrities.

For professionalism, influencer type leads to higher perceived professionalism than celebrities, $F(1,125) = 17.718, p < .01$. The descriptive analysis identifies the mean

professionalism of the celebrity endorsers ($m=2.01$) to be lower than the mean of the real influencers ($m=2.71$).

H4: Consumers will be more likely to purchase a beauty product endorsed by influencers.

H5: Consumers will feel more comfortable applying the make-up after watching the influencer's blogging video featuring the product.

No significant main effect has been found on the purchase intent, $F(1,125) = 0.75$, $p > 0.05$. Relatively, the mean is 2.85 for celebrity endorsers and 3.13 for real influencers. This result is the same when measuring efficacy using the product, $F(1,125) = 1.495$, $p > 0.05$. The mean for confidence using the product from a celebrity endorser is 2.29 and 2.55 for real influencers. The standard deviation for celebrity endorsers is lower than influencer endorsers in the purchase intent descriptive analysis.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study concludes that celebrities are considered to be more credible, professional and attractive as brand endorsers than non-celebrity influencers. There are several explanations for these results. Celebrities in this study are more prevalent and popular than the influencers chosen for this study. Ninety-five percent of the participants recognized Karlie Kloss or Rhianna in the survey; recognizability is one factor that made celebrities more credible, professional and attractive. Fewer participants were familiar with the influencers. Influencers may not be as well-known because of their smaller fan base and lack of exposure in comparison to celebrities. An influencer is considered an expert in one particular field whereas a celebrity wears many hats and has expertise in a variety of areas. Additionally, this research is based on a self-reported responses. Participants may have entered this study with a personal preference for the celebrity and even an admiration that could have resulted in biases. Celebrities are in an industry that has constant exposure; participants may have been more likely to have followed these celebrity's careers, admired their works, and even aspired to live a similar lifestyle. Celebrities are constantly in the spotlight, attending events and networking while the world watches; people usually have to search for a particular topic before they find an influencer. The outcome could have been significantly impacted if the participant didn't know the influencer at all. Additionally, the audience may rate their answers lower for the celebrity/influencer based solely on the person presenting it rather than the actual content. At the same time, participants may give an extremely high rating if they are fans of mega-stars such as Rihanna or Karlie Kloss. Finally, the overall study had limitations regarding the video parameters. The video options were limited because we needed to find celebrities and influencers showcasing the exact same product for each sample.

This left limited options for the celebrities and influencers we could use. The results for consumer behavior analysis reflect no significant different has been found in the study in regard to purchase intent and efficacy using the product.

Chapter 6

Limitation

Several limitations regarding this study are annotated in the following statements; further studies need to be conducted to address these limitations.

The total number of participants was 128. The sample size is relatively small in comparison to other market research studies. It might not accurately represent the entire target consumer group, resulting in the possibility of a Type 2 Error in the data analysis section . A larger sample size is needed in future studies to strengthen the power and encompass more of the demographic into the study.

Updated scales are needed for further relevant experimental studies for some of the dependent variable measurement scales used. The scales are based on older ones established by previous researchers in 1990s when traditional media is the primary endorsement source. However, nowadays, digital media has replaced the popularity of traditional media.

Moreover, the study used no real brands, Fenty Beauty and Estee Lauder to create relatability and relevance. However, the consumers' preexisting bias towards these two real brands may impact their ratings during the survey. In the future, a fake brand needs to be implemented into the survey to eliminate bias to increase the accuracy.

Additionally, as the literature review pointed out, one of the unique features influencers have is the ability to build a close connection with their followers. In the real-world scenario, influencers engage with the followers by updating vlogs, pictures, posts and replying comments regularly. The audience perceives them as "peer friends" and trusts their recommendations. However, the participants in this study may not even know the influencers, or may not have ever

followed the featured influencers before. A more “organic” experiment methodology should be designed for future research.

Appendix A

Stimuli

(1) Double Wear Foundation Ads



Casey Holmes, a popular YouTube influencer.

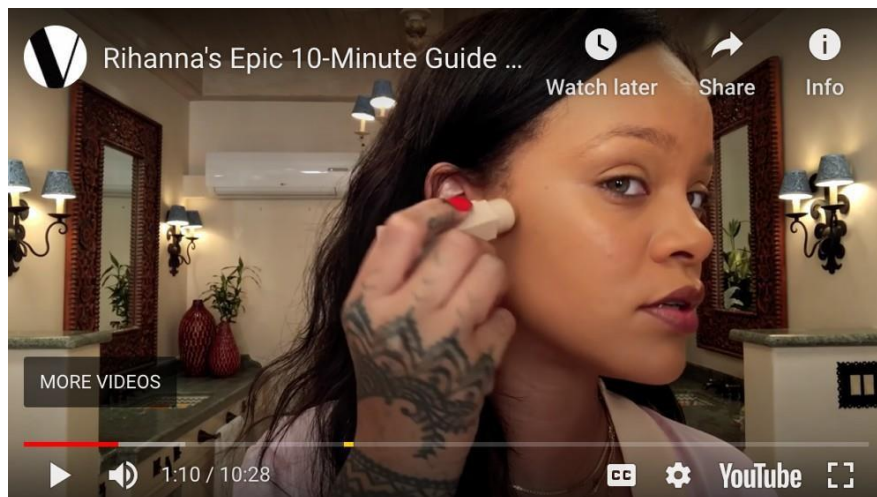


Karlie Kloss, a well-known fashion supermodel

(2) Fenty Beauty Match Stix Matte Contour Skinstick ads



Marie Jay, a beauty influencer in YouTube.



Rihanna, the famous singer and songwriter

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ACADEMIC VITA

EDUCATION:

The Pennsylvania State University | Schreyer Honors College Pennsylvania,
Bachelor of Arts | Dean's List (Fall 2016 – Fall 2019) *September 2016 - June 2020*
Major: Advertising, Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications Minor: Theater
University College London *Fall 2018*
Immersive Seminar Study of Arts and Humanities Rome, Italy *March 2020*

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Lead Researcher Spring 2020:

Theory development, stimuli design, data analysis, and report writing to investigate cross culture advertising through American Influencers for Chinese Audiences.

Research Assistant Fall 2019:

Data coding, collection, transcription, spectrographic analysis for lab research project on Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR).

Peer Reviewed Conference Summer 2020

E, Z., Zhang, Z., Tan, R. , Reed, O., Shoenberger, H. (2020). Influencer Engagement With Chinese Audiences: The Role of Language. Presented at the annual AEJMC conference in San Francisco, CA.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Ogilvy China Shanghai, China

Creative Team Intern May - August 2019

Coordinated the biggest Ogilvy campaign during the Double Eleven shopping festival for the makeup brand Chando;

Managed official Weibo and Wechat social media accounts for client Zegna, including monitoring sector trends, producing creative content, publishing graphic designs, and organizing celebrity marketing activities.